



#### Board Members

**Jennifer Putnam**  
Executive Director, Waypoint  
*Board President*

**Bill Shanahan**  
Co-Founder & Senior Advisor, Evernorth  
*Board Treasurer*

**Gunnar Hubbard**  
FAIA, LEED Fellow, Climate-Forward  
Catalyst for the AEC Industry  
*Board Secretary*

**David Birkhahn**  
Vice President, TD Bank

**Elizabeth Boepple**  
Partner, Murray, Plumb, & Murray

**Cheryl Harkins**  
Advocate, Homeless Voices for Justice

**Ninette Irabaruta**  
Senior Director, Community Engagement  
& Outreach United Way of Southern ME

**Chip Newell**  
Principal, The NewHeight Group

**Luc Nya**  
Mental Health Program Coordinator  
OCFS/Corrections Liaison, Maine DHHS

**Angela Perkins**  
Westbrook Resident

**Thomas Ptacek**  
Advocate, Portland Resident

**Jennifer Rottmann**  
Deputy Director/CFO, The Genesis Fund

**John Ryan**  
Co-Founder and Board Chair,  
Wright-Ryan Construction

**Aaron Shapiro**  
Retired Community Development  
Director, Cumberland County

**Kimberly Twitchell**  
Senior Director of Affordable Housing,  
NBT Bank

#### Staff Contacts

**Cullen Ryan**  
Executive Director

**Samantha Messick**  
Operations Director

**Vickey Merrill**  
Advocacy Director

**Chris Harmon**  
Finance Director

**Jenny Jimino**  
Office Manager

**Bree LaCasse**  
Development Director

**Brian Kilgallen**  
Development Officer

**Sarah Gaba**  
Asset Management Director

**Meredith Smith**  
Supportive Housing Manager

**Sarah Derosier**  
Asset Manager

**Sam Lowry**  
Compliance Manager

April 7, 2025

Re: LD 1029, An Act to Ensure General Assistance for Housing Does Not Reduce Assistance for Other Basic Necessities and to Increase Presumptive Eligibility and State Reimbursement for General Assistance

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine (CHOM). I also co-Chair the Maine Homeless Policy Committee which designed this bill.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 1029, An Act to Ensure General Assistance for Housing Does Not Reduce Assistance for Other Basic Necessities and to Increase Presumptive Eligibility and State Reimbursement for General Assistance. *This bill:*

- *Requires that the total maximum general assistance level provided to a person or household sufficiently accounts for housing assistance while providing adequate eligibility for other basic necessities.*
- *Increases the period of presumptive eligibility for general assistance for a person who is provided shelter in an emergency shelter for the homeless from 30 days to 180 days.*
- *Increases from 70% to 90% the amount of state reimbursement for direct costs of general assistance incurred by each municipality and Indian tribe and requires the Department of Health and Human Services to reimburse municipalities and Indian tribes 100% of direct costs for providing emergency shelter for the homeless.*

Increasing the reimbursement rate to 90% is the most significant change we can make to ensure that people are served within their home communities. The financial burden caused by the current reimbursement rate is too much of a barrier for most municipalities to overcome, causing people to leave their communities for larger service center areas. But Maine will continue to see emergency shelters remain full or over capacity, underfunded, and in jeopardy of closure unless the other two provisions of this bill are implemented.

It is important that General Assistance (GA) is available in an emergency to pay for housing while also available to meet other basic necessities, such as food, non-food, diapers, and prescriptions.

Extending presumptive eligibility would allow payment for emergency shelter for people in need. Emergency shelters create an efficient pathway for people to secure stable permanent housing. This is the best practice prescription from Maine's Statewide Homeless Council

Shelters have lacked resources to maintain sufficient capacity and staffing for years. They are in crisis, with large annual deficits – some as high as \$855,000. Without additional funding allocations emergency shelters in Maine will close – some imminently. For Maine to safely meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, we must have an adequately funded shelter system – it is the foundation of our homeless service system. Increasing the period of presumptive eligibility for people in emergency shelters is a long-term solution to this crisis.

Because of a lack of other rental assistance, GA is the primary way emergency shelters and front-line staff are moving people from homelessness into housing. This bill ensures that GA functions as the safety net necessary for homelessness prevention, and to prevent people from becoming stuck in homelessness, or attempting to live outside.

GA is Maine's safety net of last resort. It protects thousands of Mainers by keeping a roof over their head when they have nowhere else to turn. Please pass this bill to allow General Assistance to most effectively serve people experiencing homelessness.

This bill has the unanimous support of the Statewide Homeless Council, all three Regional Homeless Councils, and the Maine Continuum of Care.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.